

Inside Region 3

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Fulfilling the Promise

*The National Wildlife Refuge System -
A Distinctly American Story*

Region 3
Great Lakes - Big Rivers

A Message from the Regional Director

What is the National Wildlife Refuge System and how should it relate to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

The National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) is a collection of over 520 refuges and 3,000 waterfowl production areas totaling 93 million acres and representing the largest collection of lands and waters in the world dedicated to restoring and preserving the nation's valuable fish and wildlife and their habitat for current and future generations. The NWRS is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Division of Refuges (Refuges). Containing the most resources and staff of any single function in the Service, the NWRS is the heart and soul of the Service.

Refuges and other Service programs have enjoyed a long, symbiotic relationship on many resource issues such as migratory birds, endangered species, larger rivers, and wetlands. Half of the 520-plus refuges have their roots in plans developed cooperatively by the Office of Migratory Bird Management and the Division of Realty. (The Chief of Realty by law serves as Staff Director to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission.) In recent years, as the result of the Endangered Species Act, many refuges have been created to assist in the recovery of threatened and endangered species with direct support of Ecological Services field stations.

Numerous refuges are uniquely situated to be able to contribute to the protection and recovery of these declining, threatened and endangered species. Unlike other Federal systems that stand alone, the NWRS is dependent on its relationship with surrounding private lands. Refuges and other Service programs work together to protect resources on both sides of the blue goose signs, thus expanding the impact of each refuge within its ecosystem. This is especially true when a refuge could be directly impacted by a nearby non-refuge management action.



Regional Director
William Hartwig

Great Lakes -
Big Rivers Region

Examples of activities/programs conducted by other Service programs but which benefit the NWRS are numerous — our Private Lands programs; the North American Waterfowl Management Plan; our Contaminants program (which often assists with cleanup on Refuge lands); our Fisheries program, which has assisted in the development of refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plans; and Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) generated funding, which has allowed us to add land and improve habitat within the NWRS.

We have also spent the past few years working on developing new partnerships with States (Federal Aid), tribes, nonprofits (Prairie Pothole Joint Venture) and most recently within the Service through the ecosystem team effort. Although we have worked together for decades, I have not seen the level of interaction and cooperation between Service programs greater than it is today. We are working together for restoration/protection of valuable fish and wildlife habitat on and off the NWRS.

Do we need more dollars for the NWRS? Of course we do. And we need to all pull in one direction to secure those dollars for operation and maintenance and for construction of critical structures and functions for the NWRS. Do the other programs within the Service need more dollars? Of course they do. Now is not the time to talk of ending this 97 year relationship. I challenge everyone to find a way for us to stay together and fight to secure a better future for fish and wildlife on and off the NWRS.

Cover Image:
Helianthus (Sunflower)
Tamarac NWR
Rochert, Minn.
USFWS Photo by Don Hultman

Living Up To The Promise

promise (prom'-is) n 1. An assurance that one will or will not do something.

2. A sign of future excellence or success.

3. To provide a basis for expectation <a future that promises well>.

**syns: COVENANT, GUARANTEE, PLEDGE, VOW*

Many Service employees and external stakeholders have heard about a new National Wildlife Refuge System strategy called "Fulfilling the Promise" or "Promises" as it is commonly called. Promises arrives at a critical juncture in the history of the National Wildlife Refuge System, at a time when the Service has cast a critical eye at both the System's past and future. Promises captures the results of that self-examination, and as such is the most comprehensive and circumspect document ever produced in relation to the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The genesis of today's Promises strategy began nearly a century ago, when Paul Kroegel, the nation's first National Wildlife Refuge manager and a handful of like-minded conservation pioneers scraped and fought and, in the end, forged the beginnings of the National Wildlife Refuge System. That the establishment of the refuge system was hard-won is obvious; that the system is still worth fighting for and protecting is equally clear. It is this history—this perspective—which provided the context for the Promises strategy of today and helped define a vision for the future of the Refuge System.

A major turning point for the Refuge System came in 1997 with the passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. This Act provided a clear mission for the Refuge System and established priority uses and standards for its management and growth. The Promises strategy articulates this vision and details recommendations for achieving this future state.

Promises is far-reaching in both scope and depth, but can be explained in terms of the three primary components of the Promises strategy—Wildlife and Habitat, People, and Leadership.

Not coincidentally, these were also the same subjects examined in detail by Service Project Leaders attending the first-ever national Refuges conference held in Colorado during October of 1998. Each of these major categories includes a series of recommendations which, when implemented, will move Refuges and the Service closer toward its vision. Along with recommendations, vision statements within each category define the future vision for each area.

Once fully implemented, the Promises strategy should help ensure a bright future for the Refuge System, but this future should not be taken for granted.

On Fulfilling The Promise

"The (National Wildlife Refuge) System story is distinctly American. A story of passion and vision, of courage in the face of adversity, of women and men with a noble mission etched across their hearts, of politics, and evolving policy, of things done right and some things not so right, and a story of a heritage and culture unique in public service. It is a story as simple and compelling as one man and one boat protecting birds on Pelican Island, and a story as complex and challenging as seeking to understand the intricacies of ecosystems on millions of acres of land."

- Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark
Excerpt from "Fulfilling the Promise"

“...the heart and soul of the Fish and Wildlife Service.”

“The National Wildlife Refuge System is the heart and soul of the Fish and Wildlife Service,” said Regional Director Bill Hartwig. “Refuges are the Service for most Americans, they’re the most visible component of our organization; something people can see and hear and touch. As an agency, we absolutely must be good stewards of these lands. We must also be wise enough to anticipate future threats to the refuge system and flexible enough to meet those challenges head on. The Promises strategy is a blueprint to help us do just that.”

Key Provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997

Defines the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which is, “to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Requires the Secretary of the Interior to ensure the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the National Wildlife Refuge System are maintained.

Defines compatible wildlife-dependent recreation as “legitimate and appropriate general public use of the [National Wildlife Refuge] System.” It establishes hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation as “priority public uses” where compatible with the mission and purpose of individual National Wildlife Refuges.

Retains refuge managers’ authority to use sound professional judgment in determining compatible public uses on National Wildlife Refuges and whether or not they will be allowed. It establishes a formal process for determining “compatible use.”

Requires public involvement in decisions to allow new uses of National Wildlife Refuges and renew existing ones, as well as in the development of “comprehensive conservation plans” for National Wildlife Refuges. In addition, refuges that do not already have such plans are required to develop them.

At A Glance Guide to: Fulfilling the Promise

Purpose: A long-term road map developed by the Service and its partners to guide the National Wildlife Refuge System into the future. Promises is a reflection on where the System has been, a review of the present, and a vision for the future.

THREE AREAS OF EMPHASIS:

Wildlife and Habitat

Key Concepts:

- Wildlife Comes First
- Anchors for Ecosystem Conservation
- Healthy Wildlife Habitats
- Leaders and Centers for Excellence
- Strategic Growth
- Models of Land Management

People

Key Concepts:

- A Legacy of Wildlife
- A Place Where Visitors Feel Welcome
- Opportunities for Public Stewardship
- A System to Appreciate

Leadership

Key Concepts:

- Best and Brightest
- An Esprit de Corps
- System Integrity

National Wildlife Refuge System Chronology

1903

President Theodore Roosevelt establishes three-acre Pelican Island (Florida) as the first national bird sanctuary. During his term, Roosevelt would establish 51 bird “reservations” and four big game preserves.

1905-1912

The nation’s first big game refuges are established: Wichita Mountains (OK) in 1905; National Bison Range (MT) in 1908; National Elk Refuge (WY) in 1912.

1915

The smallest refuge in the nation – the one-half acre Mille Lacs NWR – is established on two islands in Mille Lacs Lake, Minnesota.

1918

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act between the U.S. and Great Britain (for Canada) establishes the foundation for future legislation which would greatly expand the refuge system.

where wildlife comes first

Wildlife and Habitat

The first and largest section of Promises, Wildlife and Habitat, contains 20 major recommendations and six concepts as part of its vision. This vision includes:

- Refuges are places where wildlife comes first;
- Refuges are anchors for biodiversity and ecosystem-level conservation;
- System lands and waters will be biologically healthy;
- The Refuge System will be a national and international leader in habitat management;
- We believe the Refuge System will be a model and demonstration area for habitat management fostering broad participation in natural resource stewardship;

- We will add strategically located lands and waters to the System, in partnership with others, to ensure that it represents America's diverse ecosystems and sustains the nation's fish, wildlife, and plant resources.

Recommendations in support of this vision include such actions as identifying and recommending solutions to external refuge threats, developing systematic habitat monitoring programs, and identifying management-oriented research needs for each refuge.

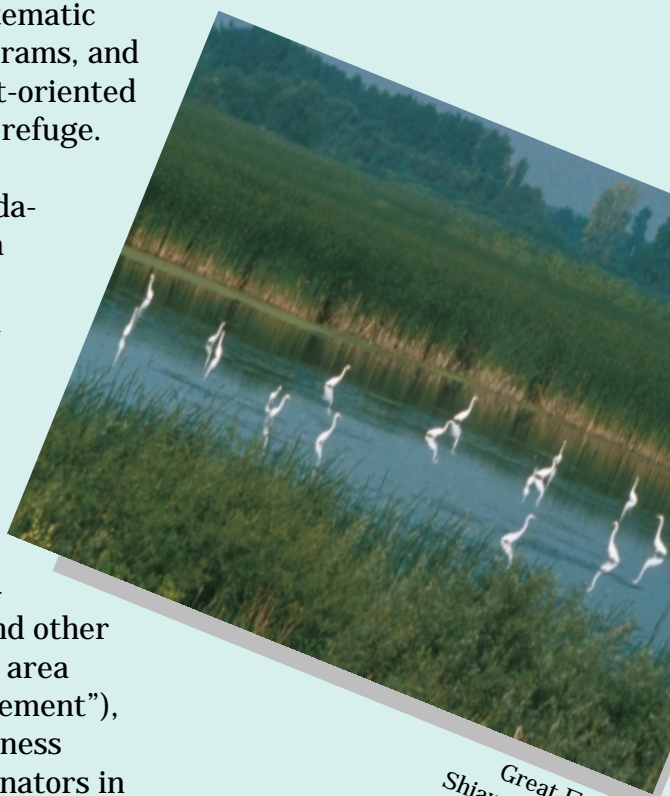
These major recommendations are supported by a series of smaller action items, each with its own target completion date. For example, as part of Wildlife and Habitat Recommendation #4 ("Develop policy and a national plan for

wilder-ness and other special area management"), Wilderness Coordinators in each region have been named.

Chief, Branch of Visitor and Information Management Tom Worthington is Region 3's coordinator.

"If you are protecting what is inevitably an island in the midst of degradation, you've lost."

- Interior Secretary
Bruce Babbitt



Great Egrets
Shiawassee NWR
Saginaw, Mich.
- USFWS Photo

It's About Wildlife and Habitat

1999 Region 3 Refuge Statistics

Total acres managed	1.2 million
Wetlands restored	10,900 acres
Uplands restored	11,800 acres
Riverine miles restored	36 miles
Acreage burned on/off	
Refuge lands	44,000 acres
Wetland Mgmt. District	
ducks produced in Minn.	254,000

1924

The Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin is established. Izaak Walton League Founder Will Dilg spearheads the effort.

1934

A presidential committee is convened to determine how to save waterfowl during the Dust Bowl Era. Aldo Leopold, cartoonist J.N. "Ding" Darling and publisher Thomas Beck suggest a "duck stamp" to raise funds for acquiring wetland habitat. Congress passes the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp ("Duck Stamp") Act.

America's best and brightest

Leadership

The third section of Promises—Leadership—contains 12 recommendations and three vision concepts. This vision includes:

- We will identify and mentor America's best and brightest to staff refuges and be future leaders within the System and Service;
- We will instill Esprit de Corps and passion for refuges and the System will be embraced by refuge employees and throughout the Service;
- We will provide a stable organization structure and clear policy framework promoting integrity, adaptability, and creativity in managing the System.

Recommendations include: the establishment of a systematic recruitment, training, and mentoring program; the development of consistent organizational structures across regions; and the restoration of the Refuge Manual. Leadership Recommendation #7, the adoption of the Blue Goose symbol—already a familiar sight throughout Region 3—as an official symbol of the Refuge System has already been completed.

It's About Leadership 1999 Region 3 Refuge Initiatives

The Prairie Wetlands Learning Center

The Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC), located in Fergus Falls, Minnesota was the nation's first residential learning center to be operated by the Service. The PWLC, which opened in 1998, offers environmental education programs for up to 96 students and instructors at their fully-accessible dormitory facility.

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (NTP) is the most ambitious project of its kind in North America. The goal of the project, which has become a model for other regions, is to identify and protect up to 77,000 acres of existing native prairie through cooperative agreements and purchases. The project's boundaries span 85 counties in Minnesota and Iowa. The first NTP acquisitions will occur in 2000.

Prairie Reconstruction

The Neal Smith NWR (Iowa) hosts North America's largest prairie reconstruction project. Over 2,000 acres of refuge lands, once bare soil, now host hundreds of prairie plant and animal species, including bison and elk. Prairie reconstruction efforts at the refuge will continue, using native local ecotype seed.

Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake

Necedah NWR (WI) is working with state and nongovernmental partners to conduct an experimental survivability study on the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, currently a candidate species for protection under the ESA. Refuge biologists released 15 of the snakes in a remote part of the refuge and will track their movements and determine mortality factors. This is the first time such a study has been attempted.

Geographic Information Systems

The Upper Mississippi River NWFR, working in partnership with USGS, continues to develop innovative GIS applications for use in species and habitat management.

1966

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act creates compatibility standards requiring that secondary refuge uses must be consistent with the major purposed for which refuges are established.

1974

The responsibilities of the U.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries are reassigned to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

1980

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act adds 54 million acres to the refuge system.

1994

The nation's 500th National Wildlife Refuge is established at Canaan Valley, West Virginia.

An Ambitious Strategy

A total of 42 broad recommendations are contained in the Promises document, each supported by action items in the Promises implementation plan—some 128 action items in total. Historically, most strategic plans of this breadth and scope have had little chance of full implementation in the government or corporate arena. Yet, because of its origin, the implementation of the Promises strategy appears realistic and very achievable.

“And it is your obligation to...move forward...in a way that does not denigrate, dilute, or diminish in the slightest degree that which came before you, because many thousands of men and woman gave their careers, and some even gave their lives, for what you are working toward—saving dirt.”

- Former Service Director
Lynn Greenwalt

At A Glance Guide to: Fulfilling the Promise

Actions Items Completed in 1999:

A total of 23 action items were fully or partially completed in 1999.
Examples include:

Wildlife and Habitat

- Wilderness proposals submitted in support of Land Legacy Initiative
- Regional Wilderness Coordinators designated
- National Water Rights Coordinator designated
- National Threats and Conflicts Coordinator designated
- Key Refuge System messages incorporated into outreach products

People

- National Law Enforcement Coordinator designated
- New draft Visitor Services Requirements have been developed
- Public use training course developed, to be offered at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC)
- Revised Public Use policies developed for priority public uses
- New outreach team established to implement revised “100 on 100” campaign

Leadership

- Blue Goose adopted as System symbol
- Blue Goose adoption published in Federal Register
- Draft System core values presented to Directorate
- Service housing policy defined, compared to other Department of the Interior agencies
- Programmatic Assistant Regional Director (PARD) recommendations forwarded for consistent organization structure within the Service

1997

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 is passed, amending the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1996 and providing a comprehensive “organic” act for the Refuge System. The Act establishes in law fish, wildlife and plant conservation as the mission of the refuge system and gives priority to certain wildlife-dependent recreational uses on National Wildlife Refuges—these uses are hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation.

2003

The National Wildlife Refuge System celebrates its Centennial. System-wide activities and high-profile media events create renewed public appreciation for the National Wildlife Refuge System and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Centennial activities also lay the foundation for a new century of System growth and conservation.

Built From The Ground Up

The Promises strategy is unique on a number of levels, but what really makes this strategy different is its origin; over 50 Service employees across the nation participated in developing the first Promises draft. This draft was then reviewed at the first national conference of Project Leaders from Refuges and other Service programs in 1998. It was here that Promises concepts were debated, challenged, considered, and eventually finalized by field Project Leaders. While sometimes emotional and often controversial, these discussions were based not on the latest wave of management theory, but rather on thousands of years of combined field experience. As a result, the Promises strategy is one built from the ground up—using biology as its principle building block and experience and common sense as its mortar.

“The process of developing the ‘Fulfilling the Promise’ plan was not an easy one,” noted Regional Refuges and Wildlife Program Assistant Regional Director (PARD) Nita Fuller. “But it was a process we had to go through. Input from the field and outside stakeholders was critical to the development of the final strategy, not just to capture where we were as a Refuge System in 1998, and how we got there, but to articulate where we wanted to be in 2003 and beyond. The end result is something all refuge stakeholders can embrace and help implement.”

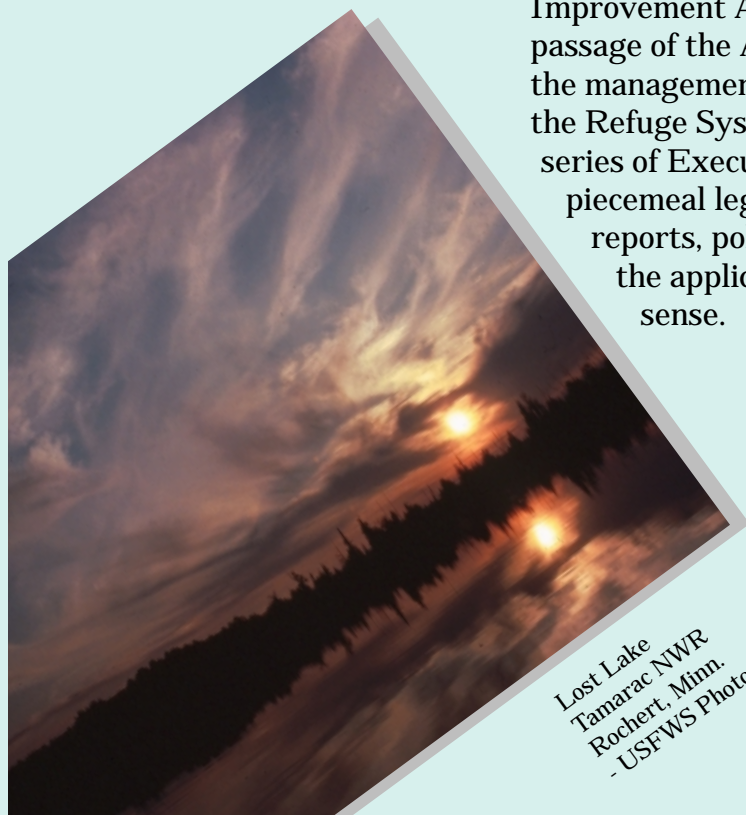
Promises is also the first Refuge strategy implemented as the result of a legal mandate—the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. Prior to the passage of the Act, guidance for the management and growth of the Refuge System came from a series of Executive Orders, piecemeal legislation, external reports, political desires and the application of common sense.



Mingo NWR
Puxico, Mo.
- USFWS Photo

But now, with the Act in place, the mission, purpose, and function of the Refuge System was made into law, and the Service was clearly obligated to develop a strategy for the future. Promises is that strategy. That the System had grown and prospered in the absence of this comprehensive directive, for nearly 100 years, was testimony to the courage, skill and tenacity of Service employees—from Alaska's frozen tundra, across the prairies and waterways of Region 3, to the Main Interior building in Washington, DC.

This commitment lives on today. Promises Implementation Teams, with team members from each region, continue to advance Promises action items every day. Cypress Creek NWR Project Leader Marguerite Hills and Refuges and Wildlife PARD Nita Fuller represent Region 3 on the Implementation Team. A recent review of the 128 actions contained in the implementation plan reveal that work has begun on nearly 70 action items. In 1999, 23 actions were completed; 36 more are scheduled for completion during 2000.

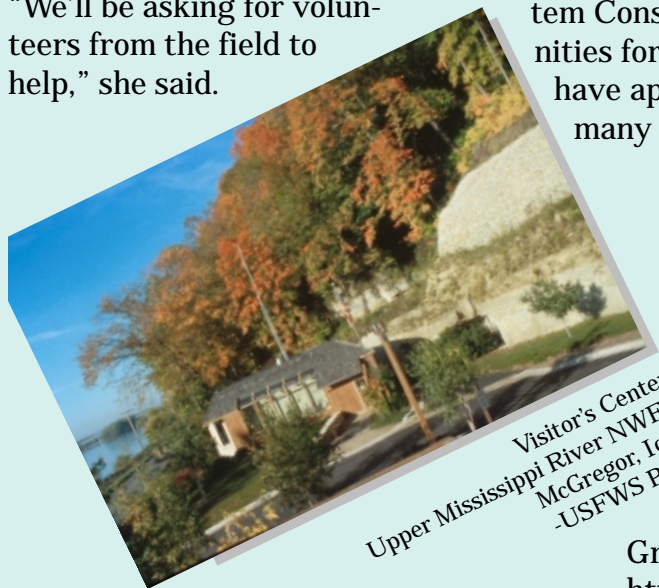


Lost Lake
Tamarac NWR
Rochester, Minn.
- USFWS Photo by Don Hultman

"Nationally, we've spent much of the last year developing an action plan for implementation," said Hills. "But that doesn't mean we haven't accomplished anything. A lot of progress is being made every day in the field in support of Promises—these are not separate activities."

Hills does not anticipate a rush to implement all of the Promises actions items at once, but rather feels action items will be implemented on a logical "case by case" basis at the regional and field levels.

She adds that implementation is not a job to be accomplished by the Implementation Team alone. "We'll be asking for volunteers from the field to help," she said.



Visitor's Center
Upper Mississippi River NWFR
McGregor, Iowa
-USFWS Photo

The Future

Although progress has already been made, it will take years before all the actions contained in Fulfilling the Promise are completed. Many target dates for the actions are two or three years in the future; some are as far in advance as the year 2012. But Refuge staffers at all levels across the country already rely on Promises as a guiding document. And there appears to be little doubt many of the Promises concepts, although developed for the Refuge System, will also be incorporated into other Service programs. Concepts such as providing "Models of Land Management," "Anchors for Ecosystem Conservation," and "Opportunities for Public Stewardship" have applications throughout many Service programs.



The Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, located in Fergus Falls, Minn., is the first residential learning center operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -USFWS Photo by Chuck Traxler

For More Information

Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region
<http://midwest.fws.gov/>

Summary of the Fulfilling the Promise document
<http://www.fws.gov/r9extaff/promise.html>

General Information About The NWRS
<http://refuges.fws.gov/>

The NWRS Improvement Act of 1997
<http://refuges.fws.gov/NWRSFiles/Legislation/HR1420/TOC.html>

The History of the NWRS
<http://refuges.fws.gov/history/index.html>

AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...

where wildlife comes naturally!



Where To Go and What To Do in Region 3:

Region 3 manages 1.2 million acres of land on 58 National Wildlife Refuges and Wetland Management Districts -- each one offering the American public unique recreational opportunities. Most refuges have a visitor's center where you can learn about all the activities and recreational opportunities available on the refuge. Recreational opportunities available on refuges may include: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation, hiking and cross-country skiing, camping and auto tour routes. More information about specific refuges in Region 3, including available activities, directions to the refuge and phone numbers, can be found on the Region 3 website at <http://midwest.fws.gov>

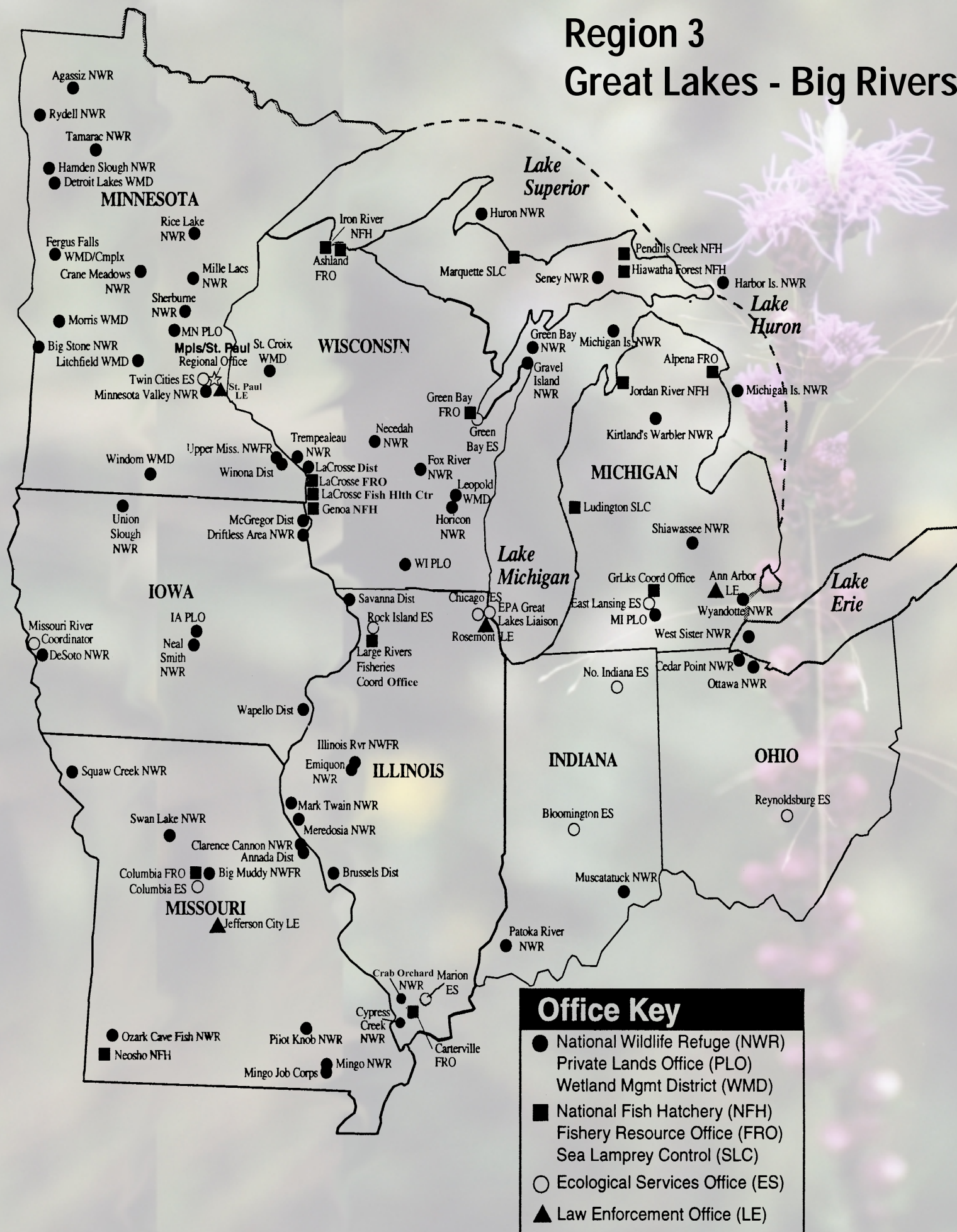
The Largest National Wildlife Refuges and Wetland Management Districts in Region 3:

Illinois	Minnesota	Missouri
Chautauqua	Agassiz	Big Muddy
Crab Orchard	Big Stone	Clarence Cannon
Cypress Creek	Crane Meadows	Mingo
Emiquon	Hamden Slough	Ozark Cavefish
Mark Twain	Mille Lacs	Pilot Knob
Meredosia	Minnesota Valley	Squaw Creek
	Rice Lake	Swan Lake
	Rydell	
Indiana	Sherburne	Ohio
Muscatatuck	Tamarac	Cedar Point
Patoka River	Upper Mississippi River	Ottawa
		West Sister Island
Iowa	<i>Minnesota Wetland Management Districts</i>	Wisconsin
DeSoto	Big Stone	Fox River
Driftless Area	Detroit Lakes	Gravel Island
Neal Smith	Fergus Falls	Horicon
Union Slough	Litchfield	Necedah
Iowa Wetland Management District	Minnesota Valley	Trempealeau
Michigan	Morris	Whittlesey Creek
Harbor Island	Tamarac	
Huron	Windom	
Kirtlands Warbler		<i>Wisconsin Wetland Management Districts</i>
Michigan Islands		Leopold
Seney		St. Croix
Shiawassee		
Wyandotte		
Michigan Wetland Management District		

<http://midwest.fws.gov>

Region 3

Great Lakes - Big Rivers





Bottomland Hardwoods
Shiawassee NWR
Saginaw, Mich.
- USFWS Photo

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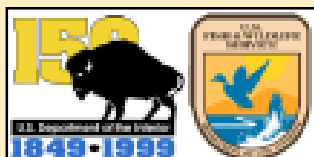
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